

## Good-For-Nothing-Land

by

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"Oh-o-o, oh-o-o" The exclamations were those of Panic caused by the ruggedness of a country road and voiced by the children of a farmer taking a ride with his family on his unusual day off. When the double buggy righted itself and the occupants had once more regained normal breathing that sunny day in 1893 comments flew from the lips of each child.

"Oh my! I thought we were going over"

"Why don't they fix this road?"

"There was a stone right in the middle of the road as big as our caldron kettle".

The farmer too, shaken out of his usual complacency by the narrowly averted upset answered crisply, "Good for nothing land". In his mental background land was good only if it would farm productively. To him this region was impossible farmland. No field could be larger than three or four acres and some of those acres were on slopes so steep that tilling of them would be a hazardous job. Then too, water run-off would take the desperately needed top soil after every rain. Also if the owner got any crops, carting them to market would be another adventure up the steep hills and down almost sheer declivities.

"Why did people come here?" was on the tongue of the oldest boy.

"Probably were late comers and the good land was all taken. This was the only land left."

Today were that same man alive and taken over the same regional but now traversable road, he would be obliged to eat his words. He would have an awesome awakening as to values of land other than crop productivity. This glacier sculptured land possesses a value for homemaking unsuspected in that Columbian year of 1893.

Urbanization has made man yearn for the simple joys of rural living and from this hunger the land scorned by the man whose fields were large and level has spiraled into value. Quiet and solitude, so continual and so deadening to the pioneer, now have curative values unknown to the farmer but very real to the tense city dweller.

One such urban resident who found the joy of relaxation in the very hills that had been dubbed "good-for-nothing" is Joseph Levy, the head of a large Chicago printing company. He has chosen seventy-six acres in a spring-fed marsh land through which ran an abandoned branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railroad. Working with the State Conservation Department, he has made a home site as picturesque as any Italian villa. Five or six pools, fed by natural springs, have been stoned up and stocked with trout. Weeping willows border the valley on the east slope and in turn these graceful trees are flanked by hundreds of pine. Oak and hickory trees edge the western slope at the foot of which are the houses of the owner and caretaker.

The owner and his family come on weekends to enjoy this spot which to them is a little bit of Eden. Pet conscious to a rare degree, the Levys have stocked their acres with animals, a privilege not allowable in a city. Thus, these Saturday sybarites delight in their two burros, one goat, a dozen sheep, dogs, chickens, ducks, cats, several riding horses, and what has given the estate an Old World charm, white guineas. Small wonder that visitors, intrigued by the beauty of the weeping willows mirrored in the six pools and the variety of the much loved pets, wangle frequent encores.

Levy's neighbors on the south on Bluff Road are also people lured by country quiet. They have built a many-windowed, fireplaced, patioed home on a level spot in this hilly terrain. Here among white oak trees husband and wife can have the light occupations so life-prolonging to retired people-- for the husband, making a lawn chair, painting an eaves spout, shoring up an embankment, or tonsuring a lawn; for the wife, the usual household duties, coddling the flower beds, and feeding the birds.

This latter duty is a favorite occupation of Mrs. Erin Gitzlaff for that woodsy region bordered by swamps and lakes, birds, never seen by city folk, visit her feeding table and nest in a score of spots that suit a bird's fancy. The Erwin Gitzlaffs are unusually well situated for permanence because their son and his family have purchased a lot east of them and have built an equally complete house overlooking Eagle Springs lake.

Farther south on Bluff Road are the Sherman Hedricks. Sensing the beauty of this region, they have placed their house on a gentle slope at the base of which is a valley which has been receiving topsoil of the hills since the Delevan lobe of the glacier receded 10000 years ago. Now this valley is an ideal garden spot. The Hedrick's home, like the previously mentioned ones, is light, modern, complete even to the point of having a swimming pool. What situation could be better suited to a young sixty-year old manufacturer than one that gives light garden occupation, ingenious manufacture of household gadgets, all in a region of heart-gripping natural beauty. The Hedricks have the once-in-a-lifetime chance to look down into the nest of a Scarlet Tanager and watch the upbringing of its family.

The outstanding place, however, of this hilly land is the country home of Mr. Edwin Cole Coleridge. Tired of the speed, commotion, and barrenness of city life he found what he was looking for-- unspoiled natural beauty in the Kettle Moraine hills of Eagle.

An architect by training, he remodeled the existent farmhouse into one of heart-warming appeal. Then farther up on the ridge he built a stately manor house, a studio, and other needed buildings. All of these buildings are blended into the landscape with shrubs and hedges. In this location he pushed his energies without hindrance or interruption designing homes, schools and apartments. When asked what his creation at Col-e- ridge had contributed to its value, he estimated a gain of 3200%.

Cole's near neighbors bought land in 1960 for \$400 per acre that had no purchasers at \$15 in 1893,

Today even native country dwellers choose rugged land for home sites. One such person a young married man has selected the summit of one of the highest hills in the Kettle Moraine Farm residents wonder what he saw in that location, land that will scarcely raise grass. A trip to the level of his cottage richly answers that question. On clear days he can see four distant towns or villages, a lake or two, and down below, a panorama of miles of forest green. Daily he and his family can have an exaltation of spirit the others rarely experience.

Another person who has found a cherished home site is the forester of the Kettle Moraine region. He, too, has selected land rugged in outline, impoverished in soil, but with landscape possibilities. He and his wife have chosen a spot at the summit of a hill, built a cliff-hugging cottage, but have eased the passage down with terraces made with discarded telegraph poles held in place by varying kinds of boulders so plentiful in these glacial areas.

The terraces are natural locations for flower beds and by bringing in wood soil, wildflowers can serve and be preserved. The forester has found not soil fertility, but a quality of land far more difficult to value-- beauty.

The photographer of this sketch has sensed the acme of qualities in the locus of a home. He has chosen a spot that drew Charles Van Hise, President of the University of Wisconsin, to study the glacial features in the Eagle Cut of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railroad. It is rough land of hills and dales, marsh, springs, potholes that ape the lake district of England, and copy the contour of Finland.

The soil cover of deciduous trees is a natural sanctuary for unusual birds, the rain cuckoo, indigo bunting, scarlet tanager, and the whip-poor-will. Could any other spot lend greater charm or richer nature lore for a growing family? This young man has made a wise investment for a lifetime of happiness in this bower of loveliness.

Another region which in that early date of the 1890's felt the scorn of the prairie farmer is on that previously mentioned Bluff Road. This land less hilly, somewhat marshy, lightly forested is bordered by spring fed Lake Lulu.

For years it was used merely for pasturage. Then the Knickerbocker Ice Company of Chicago bought it, erected a simple house for a manager built a larger building for an icehouse, another for a hotel for help, put in a runway to bring up ice, and for years took a frigid harvest from this lake. Then gas and electricity outmoded the old icebox and ice harvesting became a forgotten occupation.

This land then reverted to a hunting locale. Some of the men who came to these hunting grounds were businessmen interested in Boys Camps. They liked the region. Every feature for outing existed in the 241 acres -- trees, shrubs, animals, birds not found in more populous places, and what closed the bargain for the Fred Look Camp, Lake Lulu itself.

In 1961 some fourteen or fifteen boys from a Milwaukee Boy's Club were invited to spend a few weeks at the new Boys Camp. That trial summer produced several rules:

1. Boys must be interested in conservation

2. They must agree to work four hours a day
3. To study subjects related to forestry and conservation
4. They must do all their housekeeping except cooking.

The camp program resolved itself to this: two hours of work or study morning and afternoon, three periods of swimming or other recreation A.M. and P.M., a period of study or discussion in the evening.

For boys from impoverished or broken homes, the regular home-cooked food, the practice of all sitting down together to a meal initiated with Christian Blessing and one in which polite behavior is required, there is a refinement of character instilled which lends a boy a new respect of self.

Reverend Vernon Gowdy is the director of the camp and his wife, a friendly, out-going woman, is cook and housemother. The environment is an integrated arboretum, botanical garden and zoo. Plant life in many classes exists here. Among seed plants, the columbine, Greek Valerian, hoary puccoon, and lady slipper can be found in season. Animal life, more appealing to a boy's taste is very abundant: the raccoon, woodchuck, musk-rat, martin and deer are all present. Deer shelter their new-born fawns in the aspen cospes.

For the boys at Fred Loock's camp, no better summation of their summer interlude can be given than the well-known one from As You Like It:

"And this our life, exempt from public haunt  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing".

Good for nothing land? How very wrong that assessment was! But who could foresee that Agricultural Know-How would produce the equivocal Surplus thereby discounting the paramount value of land, or who could imagine that industrial development would give numberless jobs within commuting distances. Now men and women may buy this rough land, use greater variety in architecture and, with trees and flowers, soften the rugged beauty of a nakedly pleasing landscape. People do and will indulge their artistic and poetic nature in their homes and in so doing, lend a new nostalgia a new endearment to the cherished word home.